



CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY

SCH 2009082062

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

FROM: Mehdi Morshed
Executive Director
California High-Speed Rail Authority
925 L Street, Suite 1425
Sacramento, California 95814

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Project Level Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for a Palmdale to Bakersfield High Speed Train System

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority), as the Lead Agency for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process for a proposed California High Speed Train (HST) system, is issuing this Notice of Preparation of a Project EIR/EIS for the Palmdale to Bakersfield section of the proposed HST system.

This NOP initiates the State CEQA process and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the Palmdale to Bakersfield section of the proposed California HST system. The Authority is issuing this NOP to solicit public and agency input into the development of the scope of the EIR and to advise the public that outreach activities will be conducted by the Authority and its representatives in the preparation of the combined EIR/EIS. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), an operating administration within the United States Department of Transportation, will serve as federal lead agency for the federal environmental review process complying with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The FRA has responsibility for oversight of the safety of railroad operations, including the safety of any proposed high-speed train system. The FRA will publish a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register*, announcing the agency's intention to initiate the federal environmental review process for this section of the HST project.

The Authority and the FRA completed a Statewide Program EIR/EIS in August 2005 as the first-phase of a tiered environmental review process for the proposed California HST system. The Authority and the FRA completed a second program EIR/EIS in July 2008 to identify a preferred alignment for the Bay Area to Central Valley section of the HST system.

As part of the Statewide Program EIR/EIS, the State Route 58/14 corridor was selected as the preferred alternative between Palmdale and Bakersfield. Tiering from the two program EIR/EISs the Authority and the FRA will prepare a project EIR/EIS for the Palmdale to Bakersfield section of the HST.

DATES: Written comments on the scope of the Palmdale to Bakersfield HST project EIR/EIS should be provided to the Authority at the earliest possible date but not later than 5:00 PM Monday, November 2, 2009. Public scoping meetings are scheduled from September 15 - 17, 2009 as noted below.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on the scope should be sent to Ms. Carrie Bowen, Regional Director, ATTN. Palmdale to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS, California High-Speed Rail Authority, 925 L Street, Suite 1425, Sacramento, CA 95814, or via email with subject line "Palmdale to Bakersfield HST" to: comments@hsr.ca.gov. Comments may also be provided orally or in writing at the scoping meetings.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Carrie Bowen at (559) 221-2636 or at the above noted address.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority) was established in 1996 and is authorized and directed by statute to undertake the planning for the development of a proposed statewide HST network that is fully coordinated with other public transportation services. The Authority adopted a Business Plan in June 2000, which reviewed the economic feasibility of an 800-mile-long HST system capable of speeds in excess of 200 miles per hour on a mostly dedicated, fully grade-separated state-of-the-art track. The Authority released an updated Business Plan in November 2008.

In 2005, the Authority and FRA completed a Program EIR/EIS for the Proposed California High Speed Train System (Statewide Program EIR/EIS), as the first phase of a tiered environmental review process. The Authority certified the Program EIR under CEQA and approved the proposed HST System, and FRA issued a Record of Decision under NEPA on the Program EIS. This statewide program EIR/EIS established the purpose and need for the HST system, analyzed an HST system, and compared it with a No Project/No Action Alternative and a Modal Alternative. In approving the statewide program EIR/EIS, the Authority and the FRA selected the HST Alternative, selected certain corridors/general alignments and general station locations for further study, incorporated mitigation strategies and design practices, and specified further measures to guide the development of the HST system during the site-specific, project level environmental review to avoid and minimize potential adverse environmental impacts. In the Statewide Program EIR/EIS, the Authority and the FRA selected the State Route 58/14 corridor as the preferred alternative between Bakersfield and Palmdale.

The Palmdale to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS will tier from the Statewide Program EIR/EIS in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR §1508.28) and State CEQA Guidelines (14 C.C.R. §15168[b]). Tiering will ensure that the Palmdale to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS builds upon all previous work prepared for, and incorporated in, the Statewide Program EIR/EIS and the Bay Area to Central Valley HST Program EIR/EIS.

The Palmdale to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS will describe site-specific environmental impacts, will identify specific mitigation measures to address those impacts and will incorporate design practices to avoid and minimize potential adverse environmental impacts. The FRA and the Authority will assess the site characteristics, size, nature, and timing of proposed site-specific HST project sections to determine whether the impacts are potentially significant and whether impacts can be avoided or mitigated. This and other project EIR/EISs will identify and evaluate reasonable and feasible site-specific alignment alternatives, and evaluate the impacts from construction, operation, and maintenance of the HST system. Information and documents regarding this HST environmental review process will be made available through the Authority's Internet site: <http://www.cahighspeedrail.gov/>.

Project Objectives/Purpose and Need: The purpose of the proposed HST system is to provide a new mode of high-speed intercity travel that would link the major metropolitan areas of the state; interface with international airports, mass transit, and highways; and provide added capacity to meet increases in intercity travel demand in California in a manner sensitive to and protective of California's unique natural resources. This section of the HST system will connect the northern and Central Valley portions of the system with the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area and the southern portions of the system. The need for an HST system is directly related to the expected growth in population, and

increases in intercity travel demand in California over the next twenty years and beyond. With the growth in travel demand, there will be an increase in travel delays arising from the growing congestion on California's highways and at airports. In addition, there will be negative effects on the economy, quality of life, and air quality in and around California's metropolitan areas from a transportation system that will become less reliable as travel demand increases. The intercity highway system, commercial airports, and conventional passenger rail serving the intercity travel market are currently operating at or near capacity, and will require large public investments for maintenance and expansion to meet existing demand and future growth.

Alternatives: The Palmdale to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS will consider a No Action or No Project Alternative and an HST Alternative for the Palmdale to Bakersfield corridor.

No Action Alternative: The No Action Alternative (No Project or No Build) represents the conditions in the corridor as it existed in 2007, and as it would exist based on programmed and funded improvements to the intercity transportation system and other reasonably foreseeable projects through 2035, taking into account the following sources of information: State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs) for all modes of travel, airport plans, intercity passenger rail plans and city and county plans.

HST Alternative: The Authority proposes to construct, operate and maintain an electric-powered steel-wheel-on-steel-rail HST system, about 800 miles long, capable of operating speeds of 220 mph on mostly dedicated, fully graded-separated tracks, with state-of-the-art safety, signaling, and automated train control systems. As part of the Statewide Program EIR/EIS the Authority and FRA selected the State Route 58/14 corridor as the preferred alternative. The entire alignment would be grade-separated. The options to be considered for the design of grade separated roadway crossings would include (1) depressing the street to pass under the rail lines; (2) elevating the street to pass over the rail lines; and (3) leaving the street as-is and constructing rail line improvements to pass over or under the local street. In addition, alternative sites for right-of-way maintenance, train storage facilities, and a heavy maintenance and repair facility will be evaluated in the Palmdale to Bakersfield HST project area. See Figure 1 for a map of the Palmdale to Bakersfield section of the HST system.

No station would be included in this section as this project connects the HST line in the Central Valley with the HST line from Los Angeles and stations are being evaluated as part of the project EIR/EISs associated with those HST sections. A station at the Palmdale Airport/Transportation Center is being evaluated in the Los Angeles to Palmdale HST Project EIR/EIS. The Truxtun station option in downtown Bakersfield at the other end of this section is being evaluated in the Bakersfield to Merced HST Project EIR/EIS. These station locations were selected by the Authority and FRA in the Program EIR/EIS documents after considering the project purpose and need, and the program objectives.

Probable Effects: The purpose of the EIR/EIS process is to explore, in a public setting, the effects of the proposed project on the physical, human, and natural environment. The FRA and Authority will continue the tiered evaluation of all significant environmental, social, and economic impacts of the construction and operation of the HST system. Impact areas to be addressed include transportation impacts; safety and security; land use and zoning; land acquisition, displacements, and relocations and cumulative and secondary impacts; agricultural land impacts; cultural resource impacts, including impacts on historical and archaeological resources and parklands/recreation areas; neighborhood compatibility and environmental justice; natural resource impacts including air quality, wetlands, water resources, noise, vibration, energy, wildlife and ecosystems, including endangered species. Measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate all adverse impacts will be identified and evaluated.

Scoping and Comments: The Authority encourages broad participation in the EIR/EIS process during scoping and review of the resulting environmental documents. Comments and suggestions are invited from all interested agencies and the public to insure that the full range of issues relating to the proposed

action and reasonable alternatives, and all significant issues are identified. In particular, the Authority is interested in determining whether there are areas of environmental concern where there might be a potential for significant site-specific impacts. In response to this NOP, public agencies with jurisdiction are requested to advise the FRA and the Authority of the applicable permit and environmental review requirements of each agency, and the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to the agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Public scoping meetings have been scheduled as an important component of the scoping process for both the State and Federal environmental review. The scoping meetings described in this Notice will be advertised locally and included in additional public notification. Scoping meetings are scheduled from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. as follows:

- **Red Lion Hotel, 2400 Camino Del Rio Court, Bakersfield, CA 93308, September 15, 2009**
- **Stallion Springs Community Center, 27850 Stallion Springs Drive, Tehachapi, CA 93561, September 16, 2009**
- **Chimbole Cultural Center, 38350 Sierra Highway, Palmdale, CA 93550. September 17, 2009**

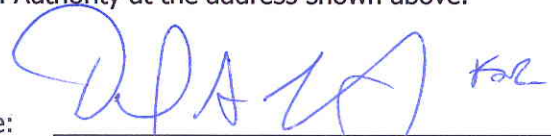
Public agencies are requested to send their responses to this Notice of Preparation to the Authority at the **earliest possible date but not later than 5:00 PM Monday, November 2, 2009.**

Please send your response and direct any comments or questions regarding this project to Ms. Carrie Bowen, Regional Director of the California High-Speed Rail Authority at the address shown above.

Date:

8/24/09

Signature:


Carrie Bowen, Regional Director